THE COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY SCOTTY BARNHART

CONCORD jazz

1. **JINGLE BELLS** (2:36)

2. **LET IT SNOW** featuring Ellis Marsalis (5:55)

3. **IT'S THE HOLIDAY SEASON** featuring Johnny Mathis (4:00)

4. **SILENT NIGHT** (3:24)

5. **GOOD "SWING" WENCESLAS** (3:33)

6. **THE CHRISTMAS SONG** featuring Ledisi (3:41)

7. **LITTLE DRUMMER BOY** (4:50)

8. **SLEIGH RIDE** (3:48)

9. **HAVE YOURSELF A MERRY LITTLE CHRISTMAS**
featuring Carmen Bradford (5:04)

10. **WINTER WONDERLAND** (3:08)

ENCORE!

(A Christmas gift from Scotty and the Basie Orchestra to those away from home!)

11. **I'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS**
featuring Ellis Marsalis and Plas Johnson (4:32)

Produced by Gregg Field
Executive Producers: Unity Music Foundation, Sam Beler, Greg Errico, John Burk and Scotty Barnhart

thecountbasieorchestra.com countbasie.com concordmusicgroup.com

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CONCORD jazz

BASIE AND CHRISTMAS

by DAVID RITZ

Think April and Paris, chocolate and strawberries, Bird and Diz, bees and honey, baseball and October.

What's the connection between the holiday season and the best blues-based jazz orchestra in human history?

Joy.

Joy that swells the heart with gladness.

Joy for the great gift of straight-ahead, high-flying swing.

Joy emanating from that bottomless source of inspiration: the immortal soul of Count Basie.

The Count Basie Orchestra has lost none of its sweet swagger, its signature sound since exploding on the scene some 80 years ago. Revitalized under the leadership of Scotty Barnhart, today's Basie crew is bristling with fresh energy and vibrant drive.

Now, for the first time ever, our most beloved Christmas songs are infused with Count's seductive aesthetic.

Producer Gregg Field—himself a veteran drummer for Basie, Sinatra and Ray Charles—has put together a holiday package containing all the sparkling ornaments: soaring charts; relaxed-beyond-reason grooves; and a lineup of superstar guests.

"Having relentlessly studied this orchestra for 40 years and sat in the trumpet section for 20 years playing that book every night," says director Barnhart, "I knew how to frame these holiday classics in a way that has Basie written all over them."

The Basie spirit is, in fact, essentially celebratory. From the get-go, Count's irrepressible feel-good spirit informed his every musical move.

"They call it a blues band," the Count once explained, "and no doubt it is. I love the blues. Who doesn't? But we're playing a happy blues, a lose-your-troubles-in-the-beat-blues. Our blues will make you lose your blues. That's our mission."

With *A Very Swingin' Basie Christmas!*, mission accomplished.

We start off with a bang. A newly conceived "Jingle Bells" is the felicitous work of Sammy Nestico who, along with Ernie Wilkins, Neal Hefti, Quincy Jones, Frank Foster, Thad Jones and John Clayton, ranks among the greatest of Basie arrangers. At 90, Sammy has lost none of his snap. His chart flies.

Listen to the opening notes of "Let It Snow" and feel the ghostly presence of Count channeled by the incomparable Ellis Marsalis, one of the deans of jazz piano. His solo, in the midst of Kris Johnson's tasty chart, is a study in understatement, another beautiful Basie trademark.

Johnny Mathis, an American treasure, lends his silky vocal skills to a spirited "It's the Holiday Season." Who'd ever guess Johnny would swing so hard? Well, swing he does. The Basie/Mathis matchup is flawless, aided by a feisty arrangement by Gordon Goodwin, leader of his own Basie-inspired Big Phat Band.

Basie's way with a ballad is legendary, a mixture of subtlety and strength. "Silent Night," perhaps the holiest of Christmas ballads, is framed by director Barnhart and given a poignant reading by alto saxophonist Marshall McDonald.

"Good 'Swing' Wenceslas" is another Sammy Nestico masterpiece, a re-reading, of course, of the good king's story of charitable passion. Note the grace of Llew Matthews' piano and the grit of Doug Lawrence's tenor.

Ledisi, a wondrous singer who comfortably occupies the sweet spot between R&B and jazz, interprets the Mel Tormé/Robert Wells chestnut "The Christmas Song" with elegant assurance. The Gordon Goodwin chart leaves lots of room for Ledisi's stylish riffs, especially her lovely final flourish.

Scotty Barnhart took pen in hand to reinvent the timeless "Little Drummer Boy," the theme nimbly stated by his trumpet, punctuated by Llew Matthews' piano, Endre Rice's trumpet, and polished off by Jay Brandford's bari and Cleave Guyton Jr.'s wailing piccolo.

Barnhart is back, both as arranger and trumpeter, on "Winter Wonderland," a fine example of the band's chiaroscuro character, the contrasting shadings of lightness and dark—those surprising horn bursts and lush reed accents—that give the chart its distinctive Basie feel.

Carmen Bradford, originally hired by Count himself, must be counted—along with Jimmy Rushing, Joe Williams, Helen Humes and Irene Reid—as one of Basie's most brilliant vocalists. Here she manages to outdo her "Young and Foolish," long a classic in the Basie book, with a deeply soulful reading of "Have Yourself a Merry Christmas." The chart is by Basie immortal Frank Foster.

Gordon Goodwin's seamless orchestration of "Sleigh Ride" assures us a smooth trip home. Scotty Barnhart's trumpet, with a little help from Wendell Kelly on bass trombone and Jay Brandford on bari, supply our trip with just the right magical/musical scenery.

"We want to offer a gift in the way of an encore," says Barnhart. "'I'll Be Home for Christmas' is dedicated to those who can't make it home for the holidays." It's Scotty's chart, with Ellis Marsalis on piano along with his fellow octogenarian Plas Johnson, famous for, among other feats, his sublime tenor work on Henry Mancini's "The Pink Panther Theme." The rhythm section—bassist James Leary, guitarist Will Matthews and drummer Clayton Cameron—sets the infectious groove with singular ease. Saved until the very end, Basie's signature sign-off—the gentle pianistic *splank splank splank*—is articulated perfectly by Ellis Marsalis at the record's loving conclusion.

"Every day that I listen to Basie," Ray Charles once said, "it feels like Christmas."

A Very Swingin' Basie Christmas! takes Brother Ray's sentiment and multiplies it by eleven—eleven of the sparest, smartest, most scintillating tracks in the annals of the great Basie book.

David Ritz has written the autobiographies of everyone from Ray Charles to B.B. King. His current book is *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin*.

When William James "Count" Basie (1904–1984) formed his orchestra in 1935, I am sure he probably wasn't thinking 80 years into the future when his orchestra, 31 years after his passing, would still be touring the world and playing to sold-out audiences. The history of the Count Basie Orchestra is a glorious one, having set the standard for swing and ensemble precision and has won every respected jazz poll in the world at least once. The orchestra has performed for U.S. presidents, kings, and queens, in movies, television shows, and has been awarded 18 Grammy Awards, the most for any jazz orchestra. It is still considered by many to be the best jazz orchestra in the world today. It's sound, explosiveness, unparalleled use of dynamics, and precise execution while swinging at any tempo is unmatched. This is a true testament to the genius leadership and vision of Mr. Basie. Studying his 50-year career carefully, you will find a wonderfully consistent example of supreme leadership, and an example of the mastery of fundamentals that enabled his orchestra to swing with deep feeling, groove, and trademark precision.

Surprisingly, in its 80-year history, after releasing literally hundreds of albums, the Count Basie Orchestra has never made a Christmas recording; until now. What you have in your hands at this moment, *A Very Swingin' Basie Christmas!,* is the long-anticipated addition to the orchestra's history, and it all began as a simple idea. Upon my appointment as Director in September 2013, I knew that we had to record an album that had never been done before, and I knew a Christmas recording would be it. I then made two phone calls—the first was to former Basie drummer and good friend Gregg Field, who is among the best producers in the business with seven Grammy Awards to his credit. I knew Gregg would be the one to help me figure out the guest artists, get the best studio, help coordinate the selection of music and arrangers to be used, and ultimately find the best label for its release. He was on board immediately. Then I had to make one more call to the gentleman who I have known for several years, and who signed me to my first recording contract as a leader with Unity Music, Mr. Sam Beler. Sam is a most wonderful and generous human being with a heart of gold who happens to also be an incredibly successful businessman. Importantly, Sam is someone who believes in giving back to his community and to music education through his Unity Music Foundation. When I told him of my plans and that I would love his support, he was immediately on board as well. Without these two gentlemen believing in my idea and in the Count Basie Orchestra, this incredible project may not have taken place.

At our first meeting to determine who would be our top choices as our special guest vocalists, one name kept coming out at the top of the list. That was none other than the incredible Johnny Mathis. Mr. Mathis is an American treasure, and is perhaps most synonymous with Christmas music. He is the third top-selling recording artist in American history only behind Elvis and Frank Sinatra with over 350 million albums sold! I grew up listening to him sing, and no Christmas is complete without listening to Johnny's great voice. What he delivered for us on "It's the Holiday Season" is truly classic and timeless and will no doubt be played all over the world during the holidays for years to come. It was a true pleasure to work with him, and he was so nice to take the time to greet everyone with a warm smile and hello. Thank you, Johnny!!!

Our additional vocalists are stars in their own right as well, and the first is someone who Count Basie personally hired in 1983, Carmen Bradford. Carmen was the vocalist for this orchestra for nine years before embarking on her solo career, and is quite simply one of the greatest singers in the world. She has the perfect combination of power, perfect pitch, swing, and grace. Luckily for us, Carmen still joins us on tour whenever her solo schedule allows, and it's a real pleasure to listen to her each night. Ledisi, our other special guest artist is no stranger to CBO, having joined us on several occasions in the U.S. and Japan. She has phenomenal range and flexibility and brings a wonderful style to the proceedings. Her young fan base will thankfully be introduced to the music of Count Basie, and that's a great thing.

Further, I knew that putting an album together such as this required arrangements that had to be Basie. Period. Would Mr. Basie play them if he heard them? In the history of arrangers for CBO, the arrangers that kept getting their charts played were those who understood that it's not necessarily how fancy or cerebral one can write, but rather how to temper those elements with restraint, clarity, and a level of deceptive simplicity that allows for one thing: that unparalleled Basie swing that invokes the feeling of the blues. When I thought of the introduction for "I'll Be Home for Christmas," I wanted to have Ellis Marsalis begin with solo piano softly on the verse which would then be followed by an explosive and swinging rhythm at three times the volume to remind those listening that this is indeed the Count Basie Orchestra. No other orchestra in history has perfected this type of dynamic control, and we are still demonstrating it today.

For "Silent Night," I used 4/4 time instead of the traditional 3/4 and arranged it specifically around the sound of our lead alto saxophonist Marshall McDonald. I wanted to give Marshall the rhythmic and harmonic background necessary to allow his sound to sing, and sing it did. I must also mention that playing just the melody is no easy feat. Marshall brings an added level of virtuosity and soulful sensitivity to this performance as he dedicates this to the memory of his late mother, Mrs. Inez W. McDonald.

"Little Drummer Boy" was an arrangement I wanted to give a modern but fun treatment to that would feature brush master Clayton Cameron. After Clayton's solo introduction on brushes, I join him and state the melody using the plunger. Then we have a very tasteful piano solo by Llew Matthews over the traditional 12-bar blues form. Trumpeter Endre Rice then joins me on the melody, followed by that explosive Basie orchestra sound carried nicely by our veteran lead trumpeter Mike Williams. After a contrasting set of solos by our baritone saxophonist Jay Brandford and our piccolo master, Cleave Guyton, Jr., Endre and I trade phrases, with Endre playing first. Clayton goes back to solo brushes before I come back in to end the tune. "Winter Wonderland" is perhaps my favorite Christmas song and I simply wanted to write an arrangement on it that swings from top to bottom while allowing me a little space to play.

Kris Johnson, in addition to being a wonderful trumpet soloist, is also one of the most talented young arrangers on the scene today. He has already contributed to the Count Basie Orchestra book in the past, and we all recognized his talent when he joined the orchestra some ten years ago. His arrangement of "Let It Snow" allows for Ellis Marsalis to play an extended solo, and Kris gets to play a tasteful trumpet solo as well. I must admit, however, that with a bit of live studio editing by producer Gregg Field, Kris' arrangement worked out even better than it had been originally conceived. But make no mistake about it; it is from the pen of Kris Johnson.

The musicians of the Count Basie Orchestra are the very best. I'm honored and humbled to be their leader and to help preserve, protect, and continue Mr. Basie's great legacy. They all understand what our job is, our place in history, and how we must maintain the highest levels of excellence that Mr. Basie set forth. From our longest-tenured member in trombonist and road manager Clarence Banks (31 years, who also happens to have the greatest internal GPS for locating dry cleaners and laundromats all over the world), to our long-time tenor saxophonist and road manager Doug Miller (who can say "toothpick" in over 30 languages), to the dean of our rhythm section in guitarist Will Matthews, to the self-proclaimed handsomest cat in the orchestra, trombonist Alvin Walker, to our youngest member in trumpeter Bruce Harris, we hope that this recording will bring you many hours, days, months, and years of listening joy.

Lastly, I must give a very special thank you to John Burk of Concord Music Group for agreeing to release this project on the wonderful Concord label. John's work as an Executive Producer is exemplary in the music business, and we are excited to be associated with him and his team. John is all about excellence and quality, and he is making sure that Concord presents this historic recording with the proper level of class and professionalism that the Count Basie Orchestra requires.

We all thank you for getting this recording, and stay tuned for the next one. You will love it too!

Have a great Holiday Season!

Sincerely,

Scotty Barnhart
Director, The Count Basie Orchestra

1. **JINGLE BELLS** (2:36)
(Traditional, James Lord Pierpont)
Arranged by Sammy Nestico
Trumpet solo by Bruce Harris

2. **LET IT SNOW**
featuring Ellis Marsalis (5:55)
(Sammy Cahn-Jule Styne)
Imagem Music LLC obo Cahn Music (ASCAP) / Chappell & Co. obo Producers Music Publishing Co. (ASCAP)
Arranged by Kris Johnson and Gregg Field
Trumpet solo by Kris Johnson

3. **IT'S THE HOLIDAY SEASON**
featuring Johnny Mathis (4:00)
(Kay Thompson)
Barnaby Music Corp. (ASCAP)
Arranged by Gordon Goodwin

4. **SILENT NIGHT** (3:24)
(Traditional, Franz Xavier Gruber-Joseph Mohr)
Arranged by Scotty Barnhart
sbsbmusic (BMI)
Alto saxophone solo by Marshall McDonald
Dedicated to Inez McDonald

5. **GOOD "SWING" WENCESLAS** (3:33)
(Traditional, John Mason Neale-Thomas Helmore)
Arranged By Sammy Nestico
Piano solo by Llew Matthews
Tenor saxophone solo by Doug Lawrence

6. **THE CHRISTMAS SONG**
featuring Ledisi (3:41)
(Robert Wells-Mel Tormé)
Sony/ATV Tunes LLC (ASCAP) / Edwin H. Morris & Co. (ASCAP)
Arranged by Gordon Goodwin
Tenor saxophone solo by Doug Lawrence

7. **LITTLE DRUMMER BOY** (4:50)
(Katherine Kennicott Davis-Harry Simeone-Henry Onorati)
EMI Mills Music Inc. (ASCAP) / International Korwin Corp. (ASCAP)
Arranged by Scotty Barnhart
sbsbmusic (BMI)
Drum solo by Clayton Cameron
Piano solo by Llew Matthews
Trumpet solo 1 by Scotty Barnhart
Trumpet solo 2 by Endre Rice
Baritone saxophone solo by Jay Brandford
Piccolo solo by Cleave E. Guyton, Jr.

8. **SLEIGH RIDE** (3:48)
(Leroy Anderson-Mitchell Parish)
EMI Mills Music Inc. (ASCAP) / EMI Mills Music Inc. obo Woodbury Music (ASCAP)
Arranged by Gordon Goodwin
Bass trombone solo by Wendell Kelly
Baritone saxophone solo by Jay Brandford
Trumpet solo by Scotty Barnhart (and his horse!)

9. **HAVE YOURSELF A MERRY LITTLE CHRISTMAS**
featuring Carmen Bradford (5:04)
(Hugh Martin-Ralph Blane)
EMI Feist Catalog Inc. (ASCAP)
Arranged by Frank Foster
Tenor saxophone solo Doug Lawrence

10. **WINTER WONDERLAND** (3:08)
(Richard Smith-Felix Bernard)
WB Music Corp. (ASCAP)
Arranged by Scotty Barnhart
sbsbmusic (BMI)
Trumpet solo by Scotty Barnhart

ENCORE! (A Christmas gift from Scotty and the Basie Orchestra to those away from home!)

11. **I'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS**
featuring Ellis Marsalis and Plas Johnson (4:32)
(Kim Gannon-Walter Kent-Buck Ram)
Gannon-Kent-Music Co. (ASCAP) /
Arranged by Scotty Barnhart
sbsbmusic (BMI)

Produced by Gregg Field

Executive Producers: **Unity Music Foundation, Sam Beler, Greg Errico, John Burk** and **Scotty Barnhart**

Recorded at Capitol Studios, G Studio Digital, Los Angeles, CA and LWMC Studios, Kansas City, MO July-August 2014

Recorded by **Steve Genewick** and **Gregg Field**

Additional Recording by **Jorge Velasco** and **Luther Wilson**

Assistant Engineers: **Chandler Harrod** and **Nick Rives**

Mixed at G Studio Digital, Los Angeles, CA

Mixed by **Gregg Field** and **Don Murray**

Mastered by **Paul Blakemore** at CMG Mastering

Package Design: **Rachel Gutek**

THE COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY SCOTTY BARNHART

With very special guests **Johnny Mathis, Ledisi, Ellis Marsalis, Carmen Bradford** and **Plas Johnson**

THE RHYTHM SECTION

Ellis Marsalis – piano • **Marcus McClaurine** – bass
James Leary – bass • **Will Matthews** – guitar • **Clayton Cameron** – drums

SAXOPHONES

Marshall McDonald – alto saxophone, flute • **Cleave E. Guyton, Jr.** – alto saxophone, flute, piccolo
Doug Lawrence – tenor saxophone, flute • **Doug Miller** – tenor saxophone
Jay Brandford – baritone saxophone

TRUMPETS

Mike Williams – lead trumpet • **Bruce Harris** – trumpet
Endre Rice – trumpet • **Kris Johnson** – trumpet

TROMBONES

David Keim – lead trombone • **Clarence Banks** – trombone
Alvin S. Walker II – trombone • **Wendell Kelly** – trombone

Very Special Guests!

Johnny Mathis – vocals on "It's the Holiday Season"
Ledisi – vocals on "This Christmas Song"
Ellis Marsalis – piano on "Let It Snow" and "I'll Be Home for Christmas"
Llew Matthews – piano solo on "Little Drummer Boy" and "Good 'Swing' Wencelas"
Carmen Bradford – vocals on "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas"
Plas Johnson – saxophone on "I'll Be Home for Christmas"
Gregg Field – drums on "Jingle Bells," "It's the Holiday Season," "Silent Night," "The Christmas Song" and "Sleigh Ride"

Additional musician members of the family:

Chuck Berghofer – bass • **George Bohanon** – trombone
Gordon Goodwin – saxophone, piano • **Sal Lozano** – saxophones
Willie Murillo – trumpet

Ledisi appears courtesy of The Verve Music Group
Ellis Marsalis appears courtesy ELM Records
Johnny Mathis appears courtesy of Columbia Records, a division of Sony Music Entertainment

Scotty Barnhart would like to thank all of the musicians of The Count Basie Orchestra, Gregg Field, Sam Beler, Greg Errico, John Burk and Concord Music Group, Johnny Mathis, Sammy Nestico, Sal Lozano, Chuck Berghofer, Gordon Goodwin, Carmen Bradford, Ledisi, Dee Askew, Joy Rosenthal, Esq., Kati Knox, Karen Beler, Matt Craggs, John Murph, Mike Wilpizeski, Dave Monette, Capitol Studios, Rath Trombones, XO Brass, George Bohanon, Willie Murillo, Kenny Burrell, Anne Pittman, Ree Case and The Barnhart Family.

Special Thanks from Gregg Field:

First and foremost to Scotty Barnhart, Dee Askew and the incredible members of the Count Basie Orchestra. Chief is smiling down (or up) on us! Our amazing guest artists, Johnny Mathis, Ledisi, Ellis Marsalis, Carmen Bradford and Plas Johnson (always wanted to hear Plas with Basie's band!). Sammy Nestico for returning to the Basie family "One more time!" and Gordon Goodwin for his incredible debut joining the pantheon of great Basie arrangers! Our engineers; Steve Genewick, Don Murray and Jorge Velasco. Capitol Studios and Paula Salvatore and John Jennings and Royer Microphones for their unwavering support.

A portion of the proceeds from this recording will be donated to music education initiatives sponsored by Sam Beler and The Unity Music Foundation.

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